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ABSTRACT

A study explored the relationship of program components and variables within successful correctional vocational education programs in adult, state administered institutions and the outcomes of those programs. Program success was determined by analysis of existing quantitative data at the institutional level on post-release employment, performance evaluation, and recidivism. The methods for collecting information on program components was qualitative, utilizing information collected through a quasi-case study approach in nine institutions located across the United States. Successful programs were found to be characterized by ten critical components/variables that functioned to overcome problems encountered in many typical vocational programs in corrections: administration, coordination and cooperation, curriculum and instruction, facilities/equipment, funding, placement and followup, planning, policy, staffing, and support services. Four ideas were offered for consideration as elements within a federal policy on education: (1) specification of communication and development of inter-agency agreements between correctional vocational programs and other agencies, (2) funding provisions to provide seed and initial monies to initiate innovative vocational education programs in corrections, (3) encouragement of development of comprehensive educational programs providing entire range of necessary services, and (4) provisions for a research component. (YLB)

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ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN STATE PRISONS

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The populations housed in correctional institutions have been neglected too often as a foci for research activity, particularly in the area of vocational education. This situation exists in spite of the thousands of persons who are released from Federal and state prisons each year, relatively few of whom have received the kind of training while in prison that would enable them to compete successfully for jobs. Further, this training gap continues in spite of the belief that the greatest aid to rehabilitation and the reduction of recidivism is education, particularly vocational education.

This situation does not imply a total absence of successful, effective or innovative vocational education programs in correctional institutions. Rather, it simply points up a condition that can be characterized as one of (a) too few programs and opportunities; (b) too little systematic attention toward identifying, describing and analyzing the variables that combine to create successful, effective and/or innovative vocational programs; and (3) too little shared information about effective vocational education programs among practitioners.

This paper reports the findings of a systematic investigation of successful correctional vocational programs in adult, state administered institutions. The study had two purposes: (1) identifying and describing the programmatic variables that contributed to effective vocational education programs in the target institutions and (2) suggesting Federal policy recommendations based on a comparison of the more successful and less successful programs as well as information gathered from program administrators. Successful programs were defined as programs that impacted on participants in ways that facilitated a high rate of in-program success, a high rate of post-release employment, and a low rate of recidivism.

APPROACH AND PROCEDURES

Program Selection Process

Requirements for selecting the sample of programs for study were set forth by the funding agency and through consultation with the Technical Advisory Group, the expert group selected to provide advice to the project. The following

specifications and criteria were set forth to guide the selection process:

Specifications

1. No more than nine programs were to be selected for in-depth study;
2. A "program" was defined to mean the entire vocational offering, including any non-vocational required components of an institution;
3. No new survey data were to be collected to select programs or to address the issue of critical components within selected programs; and
4. Quantitative data were to be available to document the level of effectiveness for each selected program on at least two of three measures of success.

Criteria

5. The data on measures of success for selected programs were to equal or exceed certain prescribed levels;
6. Selected programs, to the extent possible, were to include a mix of programs across security levels--maximum, medium, and minimum;
7. Selected programs, to the extent possible, were to represent a broad national geographic distribution pattern; and
8. Selected programs, to the extent possible, were to represent a variety of delivery systems.

With these criteria in mind, project staff set about the task of identifying and selecting nine exemplary programs for study. The task was accomplished in four phases: (1) identification, (2) winnowing nominations, (3) verification visits and (4) application of remaining criteria for selection of final nine programs.

Program identification involved screening the literature and contacting each State Department of Corrections and Department of Education to announce the project and to locate programs that were thought to be successful and to have data documenting levels of success. Ninety-four programs, thought to be successful, were nominated for additional consideration through this process.

Winnowing the nominations focused on contacting each suggested successful program to obtain information about the program, to document the existence of data on levels of success, to determine the rates of success achieved as well as the security grade and type of delivery system. This process narrowed the nominated programs to 43 programs that reported having data of the type required.

Verification visits were arranged to each of these programs in order to inspect the data on measures of success, to inquire about the delivery system, and to learn more about the operation of the program. This process narrowed the list of possible sites to 23 programs due primarily to data deficiencies.

Application of criteria for selection of the final nine programs involved ranking each program according to its level of effectiveness on each of the three success measures--post-release employment, recidivism and in-program success. If programs equalled or exceeded cut-off scores on two of three measures, they were placed in a pool for application of secondary criteria, listed by rank order based on success rates. Secondary criteria called for maximizing variance among geographic regions, security grade and type of delivery system. Ultimately, nine programs were selected with the following characteristics:

Selected Programs

Number	Success Measures	Location	Security	Delivery System
1	Post-release employment In-program success	West	Maximum	Corrections
2	Post-release employment In-program success	West	Medium	Community College
3	Post-release employment In-program success Recidivism	South	All	Community College
4	Post-release employment In-program success Recidivism	South	All	Special/Community College
5	Post-release employment In-program success	South	Medium	Corrections/Education
6	Post-release employment Recidivism In-program success	Central	Minimum	Community College
7	Post-release employment Recidivism In-program success	Central	Minimum	Special
8	Post-release employment In-program success	Central	Maximum	Corrections
9	Post-release employment In-program success	East	Medium	Special

Measures of Success

Three measures of success were used to gauge program effectiveness: post-release employment, recidivism and in-program success. Fairly stringent rates were attached to each measure, based upon recommendations in the literature and the suggestions of TAG. The specified rates were:

Post-release Employment: Rates had to exceed 60% for all program participants

Recidivism: Rates had to be less than 30% for all program participants based upon the local definition of recidivism

In-program Success: Rates had to equal or exceed 70% of all program participants doing average or better work

Data Collection and Analysis

Data on the success rates had to exist at the institution and were not the subject of continued study beyond documenting program success. Instead, attention was focused on how and why programs were successful in terms of program variables or components--the structures, characteristics and activities that when taken together, comprised the program.

A quasi-case study approach was used to note the existence, function and relative importance of components in each selected program. In addition, interview data were collected within each selected program from administrators, instructors, support staff and inmates regarding their perceptions of the program's strengths and limitations, as well as how and why the program worked. Data were also collected from state level officials in all agencies involved with the program concerning how and why the program worked.

Data within programs were analyzed for consistencies using triangulation. When inconsistencies were noted, additional information was requested to eliminate the discrepancy. Information for all nine programs was analyzed for consistencies across program components in terms of component existence, function, structure, and importance.

FINDINGS

For purpose of space and convenience, findings have been grouped by program variable and condensed to major points within components. Of equal importance,

several variables that did not seem to make a difference consistently have been noted and a typical case example has been included by way of introduction.

Typical Case Example

One of the best ways of explaining the makeup of successful programs is by giving an example of a more typical and less successful program in terms of its problems. The example is a composite drawn from the literature and from other visits conducted during the project.

Four persistent problems plagued less successful programs, each of which inhibited overall success. The first problem was the lack of policy and priority for rehabilitative programming and particularly vocational education services. In less successful programs, there was a lack of consensus about the role of vocational education, few if any formalized goals or directions for programming existed and no parity with other functions within the institution had been established.

The second major problem was isolation. In less successful programs there was little or no communication between vocational program administrators or instructors and other prison officials, the community, outside help agencies, or state level officials. The vocational program was an "inmate" within the institution just as were the incarcerated individuals.

The third major problem was funding. Less successful programs found themselves the victims of uncertain funding due to money squeezes, multiple agency funding, soft money and low priority for services. Further, the administrators of these programs were unsure about how to address this problem.

The fourth and perhaps the most significant major problem was the lack of comprehensive programming. Less successful programs were often victims of the over-selling of vocational skill training as the total rehabilitation programming. Further, many programs were locked into operations that emphasized traditional school models in which the inmates had failed in the past, had a tendency to overlook or omit the structure of the prison in providing services, and most critically, often provided only skill training to the inmate while ignoring other needs.

Program Variables or Components of Successful Programs

Successful programs were characterized by components that functioned to overcome the problems encountered in many typical vocational programs in corrections. The critical components/variables, together with the important elements of each variable are noted below. Taken together, this information suggests a framework for future program planning.

1. Administration

   - Administrator style was characterized by decentralized decision-making within program.
   - Trained educators administered successful programs.
   - The primary role of the local program administrator was public relations and funds seeking.
   - Historically, successful programs were the vision of one person who guided the program to completion.

2. Coordination and Cooperation

   - Successful programs were characterized by a high degree of contact and communication at many levels.
   - Coordination was in evidence at four levels--state, agency, state-institution, institution-community, within institution between vocational education-security-industry and maintenance/service.
   - The institution-community cooperation was most important and was emphasized through use of Advisory Committees, contracts, shared facilities, coordination of services with other agencies, community service work, and public relations campaigns.

3. Curriculum and Instruction

   - Successful programs utilized "live work," open entry-open exit formats, modularized programming, and competency-based training.
   - Instructional sequences involved career education/ orientation, skill training, related instruction, academic and remedial instruction, and social instruction.
   - Organizational design set the stage for curriculum and instruction to be effective; each successful program had a recruitment function, a reward system and appropriate scheduling.

4. Facilities/Equipment

   - Successful programs had a designated area for providing vocational education and only vocational education.

5. Funding

- Successful projects started as pilot projects on soft money and usually still involved multiple agency funding.

6. Placement and Follow-up

- Successful programs had systematic procedures for providing placement services.
- Procedures used in successful programs included use of a placement officer, advisory committees, instructors, release centers, counselors at community colleges or technical institutes, institutional contacts with other service agencies, and occasionally professional placement services.
- Successful programs were initiating follow-up systems using the positions noted above plus parole boards and self-reporting questionnaires.

7. Planning

- Successful programs had evaluation programs that were used to monitor success; the data were used for future funding and program development.
- Planning procedures within successful programs utilized employment demand/supply data, often on a regional level, for program development purposes.
- Within successful programs there were clear procedures for creating and phasing out training programs.

8. Policy

- A mission statement and a clear definition of role and objectives had been developed for each successful program.
- State level policy in states with successful programs existed, usually in form of legal mandate and/or a memo of agreement among service agencies specifying responsibilities of each agency.
- Local level policy in successful programs specified role within institution for the program and job descriptions for training staff; the mission and role of vocational education was realistic.

9. Staffing

- Staff of successful programs were certified equal to the requirements of the state agency responsible for certification in that state.
- Camaraderie and high morale were characteristic of staff in successful programs.

10. Support Services

- Services provided in successful programs included counseling, substance abuse programs, recreational programs, adult basic education, general education, assessment services, therapy, work details, survival skills and so forth.
- The most important service was counseling.
- Counseling functions provided in successful programs included diagnosis and assessment, individual and group personal counseling, program selection, career education and orientation, vocational counseling, and job placement.

Variables That Did Not Consistently Make a Difference

Several variables did not seem to make a consistent difference in successful programs even though logic and the literature suggested they should have been important. The most surprising of these variables was selection and in-take programs. Successful programs did not demonstrate consistency on types of assessment or selection procedures used, the utilization of data or the importance of the component. Likewise, there was variance on the degree of technicality of skill training offered, the influence of environmental factors, and the importance and use of inmate characteristics as a program variable.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Study findings demonstrated that successful vocational education programs do exist in adult correctional institutions. Further, data suggested that successful programs have a number of characteristics in common that could serve as guidelines in future program development. Most programs, however, did not fall within the definition of successful used in this study. This fact implies the need for Federal encouragement for creating effective programming. In fact, there is need for a definitive Federal policy on education--and particularly vocational education--in correctional settings. Specifically, given the study findings, the following ideas are offered for consideration as elements within such policy:

1. Policy should specify communication and development of interagency agreements between correctional vocational programs and other agencies such as state departments of education, state departments of community colleges and technical institutes, vocational rehabilitation, the state department of labor, and probation/parole services.

The development of interagency agreements would establish new policy and clearly outline the roles of each agency involved. Further, it would stimulate the development of mutual assistance at the local program level as well as provide guidance on how programs could be developed. Among the specific issues that could effectively be addressed through such agreements are: (a) role of agency; (b) funding; (c) staff development; (d) planning; (e) program evaluation; and (f) technical assistance for program implementation. Ultimately, it is entirely possible that through the more efficient use of funds, facilities, and personnel, the costs to each involved agency would be reduced while, at the same time, providing more effective vocational education to the target populations.

2. Policy should include funding provisions to provide seed monies and initial maintenance monies to initiate innovative vocational education programs in correction.

Identified successful programs utilized some Federal vocational education funds and seed money strategies during the initial periods of program development and implementation. This pattern could prove a successful stimulus to future program development or revision.

3. Policy should encourage the development of comprehensive educational programs that provide for the entire range of necessary services and characteristics of the incarcerated individuals.

The simple provision of skill training alone does not suffice as an educational program and cannot, alone, meet the goals of rehabilitation and reintegration. Instead, programs that deal with the total individual and individual needs and characteristics are required. Among the factors for consideration should be: (a) sound fundamental skill training; (b) responsible counseling services; (c) instruction in basic functional literacy skills, life skills and job-related skills; (d) job placement and follow-up components; (e) systematic program evaluation; (f) staff development of instructors and administrators; (g) programs tailored to the real differences and needs of

this special needs population; (h) program planning including course development and determination; and (i) community coordination.

4. Policy should include provisions for a research component.

The effect of differing organizational arrangements and different mixes of program variables should be investigated in order to determine which institutional arrangements have what kind of effect on the provision of successful vocational education. At present, such information is not available or is conflicting in nature. Research on each question should produce answers that will be useful in planning, developing, and implementing effective programs.